

# Presenting the Oppositional Gaze for Latina Women in Film

**AYURG** | Arts, Humanities, and Performance (AHP) | *Tags: Creative Output*

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal's structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The focus is made clear through an explicit research question, which is more broad as it arrives earlier in the proposal. Moreover, it presents a clear gap in knowledge, which is justified through a scholarly literature review appropriate to the particular creative field.	Since AYURGs are specifically asking for project-related expenses, the methodology should be focused on the aspects that require funding.
The project is made feasible by narrowing down the scope by genre and by identifying a particular analytical framework for shot composition.	The process the student will go through to answer their research question is clear; however, it would also be useful to know more about their end goal of creating a film.
The methods and the creative process are justified in terms of how they help to answer the research question/address the gap in knowledge.	
The preparation section of the proposal highlights relevant past experience and why the project is valuable to the student's personal goals.	



Other Key Features to Take Note Of
Creative Arts projects must describe their creative process (whether it is performance, writing, visual arts, or other) and how that process helps to answer the identified research question.
Creative Arts projects should justify their medium (play, performance, poetry, etc) and make an argument for why this art is needed and/or will add to important conversations.
Creative Arts projects should describe their intended audience or impact on an audience, which helps to justify the artist's vision and goals.
Though AYURGs are often used to fund larger projects like senior thesis, the proposal itself should focus on the aspects of the project for which you are specifically requesting funding.

#MeToo was created by Tarana Burke with the intention of bringing awareness to sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. In 2017, the hashtag sparked into a world-wide movement by women who began to speak out against misogynistic practices within the entertainment industry specifically<sup>i</sup>. While #MeToo works towards making the entertainment industry more equitable through the removal of abusive men from positions of power, it fails to address the canon of production techniques perpetrating the sexist male gaze that are established by abusive men in the industry. In my research I will directly address this discrepancy by asking the question: how can I create a film that centers disenfranchised female bodies void of the male gaze? In order to answer this question, I will define camera shots and mise en scène (lighting, production design, costumes, and character blocking) that adhere to the male gaze and shots that oppose it. Then, I will apply the oppositional techniques researched by shot listing and filming a movie that exists outside of the male gaze.

In the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey observes that the sexist film industry perpetrates the objectification and fetishization of female roles through what she calls the "male gaze"<sup>ii</sup>. The male gaze is composed of three male perspectives in film: the man behind the camera, the male characters within the story, and the audience viewing the film<sup>iii</sup>. All of these gazes, which are controlled by a male director, highlight women for their sexual and aesthetic "to-be-looked-at-ness" for the eyes of men<sup>iv</sup>. I will be using this text to primarily distinguish shots and lighting that highlight the scopophilic gaze of women's bodies. For example, close-up shots of bodies, shots of women from over a man's shoulder outside of a classic shot-reverse-shot conversation, shots that depict active men observing passive women, and camera movements dictated by male character movement are all examples of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look". In order to narrow my frame of reference, I will specifically be focusing on the male gaze within body genres (horror, comedy, melodrama) because they primarily center women protagonists. Body genres, as defined by Richard Dyer are genres that evoke bodily responses from audiences<sup>v</sup>. Horror, comedy, and melodrama all qualify as body genres because horror evokes audiences to jump up and yell out in fright, comedy causes audiences to laugh, and melodrama provokes audiences to cry.

Linda Williams in "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" importantly notes that the bodies within these films, despite centering women, are often in the process of being "moved or moving" by men<sup>vi</sup>. Carol Clover notes that active women in slasher films are portrayed as being not "fully masculine, [and] not fully feminine"<sup>vii</sup> and therefore allow male spectators to identify with female characters<sup>viii</sup>. This form of the male gaze is able to occur because, while it is through the female body that the audience is sensationalized, "the sensation is an entirely male affair"<sup>ix</sup>(97). In a production, phallic imagery in weapons is just one of the ways in which men are able to identify with female characters<sup>x</sup>. The application of body genre analysis in my research will manifest in my examination of woman's POV shots and phallic mise-en-scène which both allow male audiences to connect with female protagonist yet nevertheless maintain the male gaze.

The last major text that is important to my research is bell hooks' essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators". In her essay, hooks criticizes Mulvey's theory, and by extension Clover and Williams' work, for refusing to acknowledge black bodies<sup>xi</sup>. Black female bodies, unlike white ones, are repressed, denied, interrogated and ultimately used to enhance and maintain white womanhood<sup>xii</sup>. The oppositional gaze is a means of political resistance against the repression of a black women's right to look<sup>xiii</sup>. Unlike theories on the feminine gaze, which are criticized by Judith Butler as being "a pervasive heterosexism in feminist theory" where "performative accomplishments claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity", the oppositional gaze stands as

★  
The focus of the project is clear within the first paragraph.

★  
Includes an explicit research question.

★  
Background draws on works from other relevant fields with clear logic flow.

★  
Defines jargon. You can assume your audience is educated, but not necessarily an expert.

★  
Justifies use of specific genres.

★  
Identifies gap in knowledge.

★  
Justifies focus of project.

existing opposite of the male gaze<sup>xiv</sup>. Bel hooks is vital to my analysis because she is the only woman of color who is included in the cannon of filmtheory. In my research, I will specifically focus on Latina women in film first because there is no canonical film theory on Latina women and second because a recent USC Annenberg study found that from 2017-2018, "Latinas were the most likely to be hypersexualized -- as measured by sexy attire or some nudity -- in comparison to all other groups (white, Black, Asian, other)" <sup>xv</sup>.

My film will center Latina women and will draw from horror, comedy, and melodrama in order to visually oppose the canonical production techniques that utilize male gaze. I will first analyze the visual composition of three blockbuster films—a comedy, horror, and melodrama— starring a Latina actress in order to identify portrayals of the male gaze on Latina women. These films are Kevin Bish's comedy *Hitch*, David Moreau and Xavier Palud's horror *The Eye*, and Alfonso Arau's melodrama *Like Water for Chocolate*. In my analysis I especially look at shots creating phallic imagery, portraying passive women, fetishizing women, whitewashing brown female bodies, and using brown female bodies in order to elevate the image of white female bodies and take note of their shot composition, perspective, and angle. Next I will take three films—a comedy, horror, and melodrama—that have recently received critical acclaim for being feminist films. These films are: Olivia Wilde's comedy *Booksmart*<sup>xvi</sup>, Greta Gerwig's drama *Ladybird* <sup>xvii</sup>, and Jordan Peele's horror *Us*<sup>xviii</sup>. I believe that *Booksmart* portrays body humor performed by women without demeaning or sexualizing them, *Ladybird* depicts complex, and melodramatic emotions without the sexualization of women and promotion of unhealthy heterosexual relationships, and *Us* portrays a black woman protagonist who is at the forefront of a story that is not about a struggle with a violent man who subjects her body to torture. Out of all three movies, Jordan Peele's *Us* is the only film that adheres to Bel hooks' oppositional gaze, allowing black women to see themselves reflected in film. I plan to use shots devoid of the male gaze, and in the case of *Us*, shots that center women of color void of the male gaze. I will specifically record lighting, production design, costumes, and camera movement that are not subject to the male gaze and can be considered a part of the oppositional gaze for Latina women. Last, I will compile a shot list that utilizes the elements listed and use to film a short movie that centers a Latina cast that exists on screen outside of the male gaze and within the oppositional gaze. A figure depicting this process is in Appendix A.

My research will contribute to my senior directing thesis project in the RTVF department. I will perform my research and shot list up until week 4 of winter quarter, when I will then film my project the 4th and 5th weekends. I plan to edit my project until reading week of June (the senior directing final showing is this weekend). I am an experienced filmmaker, and have taken production classes such as RTVF 190, 358 and theory classes such as RTVF 360 and 220. I have also taken Gender Studies 361 and 321, which has exposed me to feminist theories and approaches of feminist analysis. My experience outside of class include work on 7 student film projects as a production designer (5 films), costume designer (1 film), and director (1 web series). I have also worked as an art intern on a professional set for the feature film *I Used to Go Here* (2020) directed by Kris Rey. My project is my passion, and it reflects not just what I have studied academically but what I hope to achieve professionally. I am a Latina woman who aspires to become a professional director, and it is personally important to me to identify a method in which to center Latina women can be portrayed outside of the dominant male gaze. In such a sexist and racist industry, it is vital to hold accurate representation of Latina women that women can connect with. Moreover, I strive to contribute to a research topic that deserves canonical film scholarship yet is strongly lacking in all capacities.

Methods are defined and explicitly justified in terms of how each step helps to answer the research questions.

Specifies what factors will be taken into consideration in developing an oppositional gaze.

Researcher lists preparation using relevant courses and previous experiences. They connect it back to their personal goals.

Pattern of describing a step of methodology then explaining why the step is taken and connecting back to research aim.

It would be helpful to have a clear idea of what the creative output will be. What will the subject of the short movie be? What genre? How will compiling this shot list inform its production?

## Notes

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- i Tarana Burke, . "The Inception." *metoo*. . <https://metoomvmt.org/the-inception/>. (2018).
- ii Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", In *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings, Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, New York: Oxford UP: (Dyer 1985): 837.
- iii Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", In *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings, Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, New York: Oxford UP: (Dyer 1985): 843.
- iv Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", In *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings, Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, New York: Oxford UP: (Dyer 1985): 837.
- v Richard Dyer, "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms." *Jump Cut* 30 (1985): 27.
- vi Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" *Film Quarterly* 44: 4.
- vii Carol Clover ""Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film."" *Representations* (27): 204
- viii Ibid.
- ix Carol Clover ""Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film."" *Representations* (27): 206.
- x Ibid.
- xi Bel Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators". *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, (1992): 115.
- xii Bel Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators". *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, (1992): 117.
- xiii Bel Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators". *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, (1992): 127.
- xiv Judith Butler, ""The Question of Social Transformation." *Counterpoints* (242): 6.
- xv Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Choueiti Choueiti, Dr. Katherine Pieper, Kevin Yao, Ariana Case, and Angel Choi. 2019. "Inequality in 1,200 Popular Films: Examining Portrayals of Gender, Race/Ethnicity, LGBTQ & Disability from 2007 to 2018." *USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative* 3.
- xvi Simran Hands, ""Booksmart review- fast, funny, and feminist." *The Guardian*."
- xvii Laura Williams, ""Youth in revolt: is Lady Bird the first truly feminist teen movie?" *The Guardian*.
- xviii Caitlin Gallagher, ""Us' Broke A Box Office Record For Films Starring Black Women, Solidifying Lupita Nyong'o's Super Stardom," *Bustle*.

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*Hitch*. Columbia Pictures, 2005.

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<https://www.bustle.com/p/us-broke-a-box-office-record-for-films-starring-black-women-solidifying-lupita-nyongos-super-stardom-16988721>.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/may/25/olivia-wilde-booksmart-review-fast-funny-feminist>.

hooks, bel. n.d. "The Oppositional Gaze ." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* , 115-131.

Boston: South End Press, 1992.

*Ladybird*. A24, 2017.

*Like Water for Chocolate*. Miramax, 1992.

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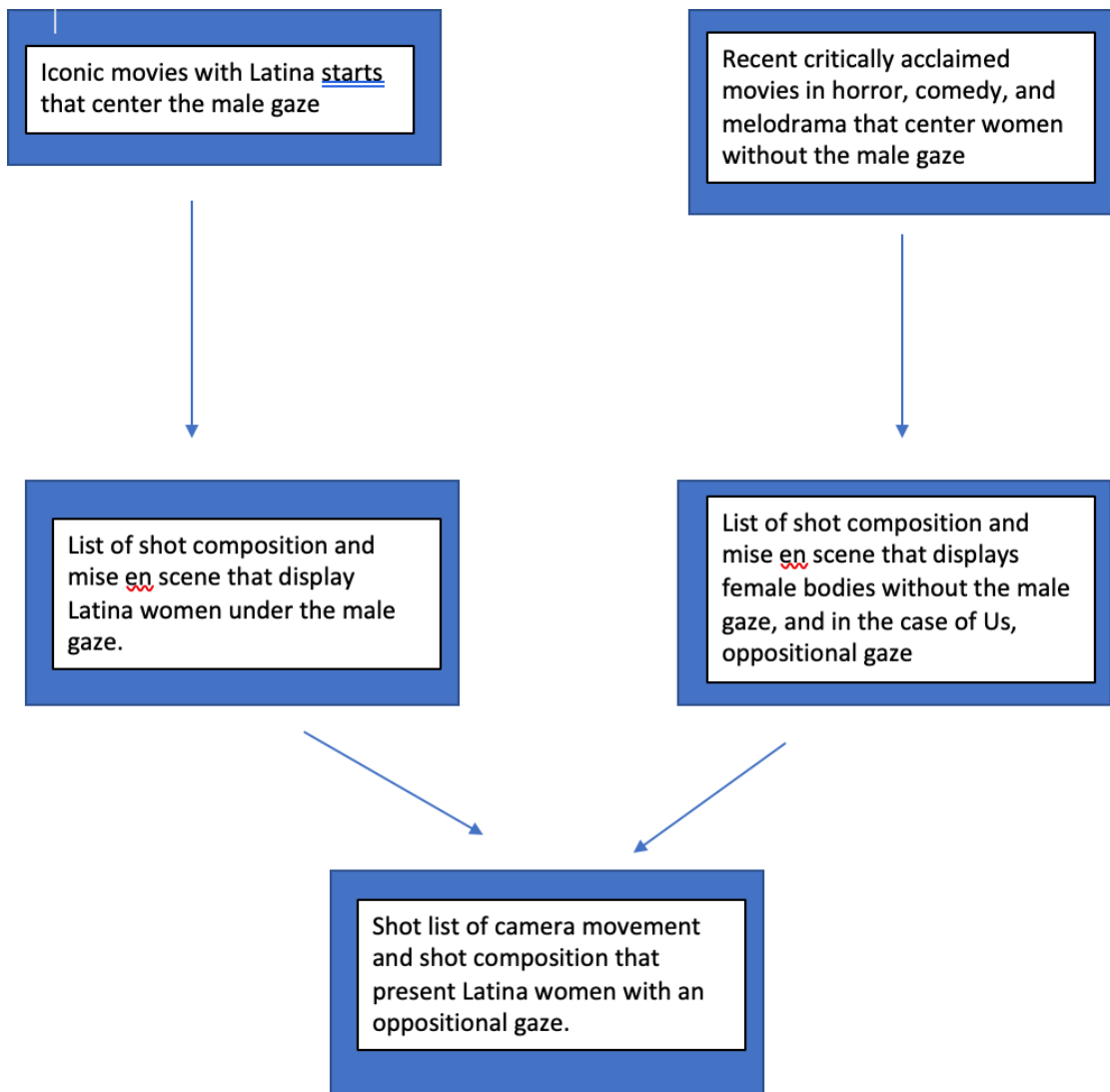
*The Eye*. Paramount Vantage, 2008.

*Us*. Universal Pictures, 2019.

Williams, Lara. 2018. "Youth in revolt: is Lady Bird the first truly feminist teen movie?" *The Guardian*. Febuary 20. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2018/feb/20/is-lady-bird-a-feminist-teen-movie-greta-gerwig-saoirse-ronan>.

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Appendix A



AYURG Application (Fall 2020): Radio, Television, Film

SECTION	BUDGET	SPENT	REMAINING	INCOMES	
Transportation to Set (Motorpool, U-Haul)	\$450.00	\$0.00	\$450.00	Senior Directing	\$2,000.00
Food (ex. snacks and meals for crew)	\$250.00	\$0.00	\$250.00	URG Grant	\$1,000.00
Equipment/Locations	\$1,989.00	\$0.00	\$1,989.00	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,000.00</b>
Prod Design/Costumes (ex. props, set design)	\$460.00	\$0.00	\$460.00		
Festivals	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	<b>Remaining</b>	
<b>Subtotal w/ Lesser Lenses</b>	<b>\$3,249.00</b>			Projected Total	-\$249.00
<b>TOTAL (with 10% contingency)</b>	<b>\$3,545.30</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>		Current Total	\$3,000.00
<b>Notes:</b>					
Filming occurs February 1,2,3 And 8,9,10 of 2020					
Additional costs will be covered through fundraising					
*If fundraising not available, film submissions will be cut and cosumes will be cut the rest of the way to accommodate new budget					

The student provided a budget in a format that likely matched a different grant submission. It was not clear to the committee which specific aspects the AYURG grant would cover.



TRANSPORTATION BUDGET		
Expenses	Name	Budgeted Amount
Motorpool to transport		\$300.00
Gas (in general)		\$150.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$450.00</b>

FOOD BUDGET		
Expenses	Name	Budgeted Amount
Food for crew		\$250.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$250.00</b>

EQUIPMENT AND LOCATIONS BUDGET		
Expenses	Name	Budgeted Amount
Red Raven Body Kit (Camera)		\$420.00
Schneider Xenin EF Prime Kit (Lenses)		\$240.00
EasyRig		\$175.00
Follow Focus		\$112.50
Alice Millar Church		\$120.00
Apartment (Air-BnB)		\$400.00
Office Space		\$250.00
Batteries		\$45.00
Harddrive		\$150.00
Insurance		\$76.50
<b>Total Lesser Lenses</b>		<b>\$1,989.00</b>

PROD DESIGN/COSTUMES BUDGET		
Expenses	Name	Budgeted Amount
Costumes (10 characters)		\$250.00
Apartment Props		\$30.00
Apartment Set Decoration		\$100.00
Office Props		\$50.00
Office Set Decoration		\$30.00
Church Props		\$0.00
Church Set Decoration		\$0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$460.00</b>

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